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Repeated wins against cancer strengthen survivor

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Beverly Bess is a four-time winner in bouts with cancer, three of them breast cancer.

For her experiences, the Metropolis, Ill., native and Hazelwood, Mo., resident champions early detection and dogged opposition to the disease. The struggles against cancer have left Bess stronger, much more enlightened and a point person promoting breast cancer awareness and diagnostics.

"You can beat it," Bess said. "I'm a fighter, and they tell me I'm cured now. I have been in remission four times."

That winning struggle with cancers has

led husband Rudy Bess and Beverly to co-found the Hope Light Foundation, a vehicle of cancer information and hope toward surviving it.

The foundation has established Cancer Corner information centers in some public libraries, including that of Metropolis, and is working

toward establishing a Hope Light on the Metropolis riverfront, a working lighthouse tourism attraction that will serve as a literal beacon of hope with cancer awareness.

"She's my hero," Rudy Bess says of his spouse.

Beverly's history with cancer started with a diagnosis of breast cancer in 1983 at age 36. She was tested after finding a lump herself.

"They thought that was very early in life for cancer, but now I know that cancer knows no age," she said.

After surgery, Bess got a clean bill of health.

Then came a 1996 diagnosis of breast cancer, not a leftover of the earlier cancer, but a new threat.

"It was more aggressive, and I had chemotherapy and radiation to treat that," she said.

In 2003, Bess experienced ongoing back pain and was tested for cancer, the results coming back negative.

"I knew something wasn't right," she said. "Nobody



Photo provided

Rudy and Beverly Bess hope to establish a lighthouse at Metropolis, Ill., to promote cancer awareness. Beverly Bess, a Metropolis native, has overcome three bouts with breast cancer.

knows your own body like you do. I went for a second opinion."

Further testing diagnosed

her with ovarian cancer. She was treated for that and again cleared.

Ongoing screening then

revealed another breast cancer last year. Becoming an old hand at coping with such a diagnosis, if that's possible, Bess underwent another surgery and banished the disease.

"The first time you hear those words, the first thing you say is 'Why me?'" she said. "Then when you hear it after that, you say, 'Why me again?'"

Bess said she has been fortunate in that her cancers have been small, a credit to screening early and often.

"Early detection is so important," she said. "Self-examinations are key, and I very much support the idea of regular mammograms at an earlier age."

Along with early diagnosis, prompt and effective treatment are crucial, Bess said.

"My doctors have been wonderful," she said. "They gave me options for treatment, but of course they would make recommendations, and I've followed those."

Bess said much of the fight against her cancers has been a state of mind.

"A positive attitude is so im-

portant," she said. "You need good support from family and friends, but you have to stay upbeat. Good nutrition and exercise has much to do with it, too."

Bess said she's returned to work after her treatments. Today she's still a senior teller at a Bank of America.

"It's important to get back to your routine," she said. "Not that you don't think about the cancer maybe coming back, but you have to keep your mind occupied. You need to stay busy."

Bess says she's comfortable with being an example that cancer can be defeated as long as it's detected with due vigilance and treated appropriately as quickly as possible. She's an enthusiastic proponent of cancer education.

When it picks on you four times, one had best come to know the enemy.

For more information on the Hope Light Foundation, see the website www.hopelightproject.com.

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